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ABSTRACT

The effect of nonverbal behavior on communication is apparent, but educators are left with the question of how an awareness of nonverbal behavior can fit into the classroom. In fact the average classroom offers a vast supply of information about nonverbal communication that remains relatively untouched in scientific studies. The processes of acceptance and understanding of ideas and actions on the part of both students and teachers involve expensive nonverbal elements. The teacher interested in improving his own communication skills will find the classroom a place for practice and exploration. Some possible areas of concentration include an examination and interpretation of different students' reactions to questioning techniques, the development of groups and social interaction in the classroom, the examination of cultural clashes that occur as a result of different uses of nonverbal behavior, the study of the effects of dress and hair styles on teacher-student interaction, and the analysis of seating arrangements and architectural design as it affects classroom communication. (Author/RB)

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Nonverbal Behavior and the Communication Process

Ann Landers, well-known columnist, once responded to a query from a girl on how was the best way to meet a shy boy who rode on the same bus with her each day. Landers suggested to the girl that the important thing was to get the man to talk first because that was really the way he wanted it. To accomplish this, Landers recommended that the girl get off the bus with a heavy package, such as several dozen bricks well wrapped. Presumably the hero would be unable to avoid seeing a lady in distress and would immediately appear at the lady's side to offer assistance. If he didn't, Landers urged the girl to drop the package or twist her ankle; the male could never overlook this opportunity for demonstrating his gallantry, and he would be certain to carry both the girl and the package to their destination; once there, the girl could offer him refreshments, thank him and settle down for a get-acquainted chat.

It has been estimated that only 35 per cent of the social communication among people is verbal; the remaining 65 per cent finds expression through nonverbal modes of behavior such as the above.[1] During the first two years of a child's life, the child exhibits an extensive repertoire of nonverbal signals to communicate with those around him; he also learns to interpret various nonverbal signals he receives from others. This process continues and takes on additional influence as the individual grows older because the average person

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actually speaks words for a total of only ten to eleven minutes daily, with the standard spoken sentence taking only about 2.5 seconds per utterance.[2] For this reason the nonverbal aspects of communication play a vital role in our understanding of each other.

The fact that man conveys much of his meaning via nonverbal behavior has attracted interest from the scientific community which, in turn, has led to the development of kinesics, the study of body movements and their role in communication. Two schools of thought exist in the behavioral sciences about body movement. Members of the psychological school view nonverbal communication as simply the expression of emotions, but those individuals who belong to the communicational school--mainly anthropologists and ethologists--are concerned with behaviors of posture, touch and movement as they relate to social processes like group cohesion and regulation.

As a result of studies in kinesics, several general assumptions about body movement have emerged. It has been demonstrated that body movements, including microscopic details not visible to the normal person's eye, can be observed, recorded and analyzed. It also has been determined that a mere compilation of lists of gestures and their meanings is useless without accompanying reference to the specific contexts in which gestures and movements are observed. This latter point has caused some confusion among the public since books such as Julius Fast's Body Language, advertised with blurbs like "Learn to read the body as easily as you read a book," have convinced the public that certain actions, no matter what the context, always mean the same thing. How many people have been sorely embarrassed by following such misconceptions is not available, but we can suspect the number is large.

In the early 1900's a German by the name of von Osten bought a horse and trained him to count. The horse learned to answer correctly by tapping his front hoofs. Hans, the horse, proved to be a quick study and soon was performing feats that astounded the public; he could tell time, count the number of people in an audience, and use a calendar. Clever Hans, as he became known, baffled the experts and only after two scientific commissions had investigated both the horse and his owner was the secret of Hans' prowess revealed. When Hans was given a question, onlookers naturally would lean forward slightly and tense their bodies while they waited to see if he could give the correct reply. When Hans reached the correct number of taps for the answer, onlookers would relax and make a slight movement of their heads to indicate amazed acceptance. Hans, clever horse that he was, responded to the nonverbal behavior of his audience. Admittedly, Hans was an exceptional case, but some people either because of professional training or through natural insight are quite perceptive and skillful in observing and interpreting nonverbal behavior.

A tremendous range of human behavior exists within the confines of nonverbal communication; body motion, or kinesic behavior, usually includes gestures, movements of the body, limbs, hands, feet and legs, facial expressions, eye behavior and posture. The wide range of possibilities within each of these shows just how difficult the task of the researcher is. For instance, it has been determined that the human face alone is capable of making almost 250,000 different expressions; add to these the infinite variations that an individual can supply with motions of the fingers, arms, legs and feet and one can see why kinesics experts are still struggling to classify and interpret the nonverbal behavior of the human being. The task is so complex

that various systems of notation have been developed to record all the myriad details in various nonverbal behaviors.

Proxemics, the study of man's use and perception of his social and personal space, offers the easiest place for an individual to begin if he wishes to develop skill in observing nonverbal communication. A good starting point is with situations where people come together for communicational exchange. When two individuals come together for such an exchange, they address each other, exchange greetings and then assume a vis-a-vis position. Once these preliminaries are completed, the individuals will embark upon more subtle movements; most of these will center upon adjusting the distance between themselves according to their race, their level of intimacy, their prior relationship, their business together, and the available physical space.

The handling of space during communicational exchanges tends to differ from culture to culture; Latins, French and Eastern-European Jews stand quite close to one another and within easy touching range while people of North European, English or British-American heritage tend to use larger interpersonal distances.[3] These individuals stand just beyond easy tactile range and do not use much touch in conversation. Studies conducted with students of different nationalities revealed that Arab students assumed more immediate or closer positions relative to each other during social interaction than did North American students. Greeks, Americans, Italians, Swedes and Scots, in that order, assign increasing distance between communicators.[4] A lack of awareness about the importance of distance in communication can lead to communication difficulties. An English-Canadian teacher, for example, may feel uncomfortable at the close proximity that her French-Canadian pupils and

colleagues maintain during conversation. Not being aware of this facet of their cultural background, she may feel personally affronted and even assaulted. The same problem may arise with the Jewish child from New York's lower East Side where close contact is the rule. If this child moves to the Mid-West, she may feel that mid-Westerners are cold and distant.

Space also provides indicators of the amount of involvement in a conversation. If a couple is speaking privately and does not want to be interrupted, they will close their vis-a-vis when others approach; the couple may turn in, face to face, stand closer to each other and possibly place their arms in such a way as to create a barrier. The individual who ignores these signals and enters the conversation anyway should not be surprised at the chilly reception he may receive. If, on the other hand, no need exists for privacy or being secretive, the people communicating will maintain a fairly large interpersonal distance and stand open to engage additional parties; this openness usually is signaled by individuals standing at approximately 60 or 90 degree angles from each other. Occasionally modifications to these stances appear; if a group wishes to be approached from only one direction, individuals within the group will tend to place their arms akimbo on the side which they wish to remain closed. Such body placement assures the group that they can control more easily the number in the group and that attention will remain focused rather than being drawn away, as might be the case if people approached from all sides.

Man has a strong territorial instinct and develops markers to alert others to his claims on space. A person can easily note during a gathering how each group maintains a small buffer of space around it

and that any straying into another group's territory is sensed immediately and either apologies are forthcoming or a subtle shifting occurs so that the buffer is once more in operation. But observance of territorial markers appears in other ways as well. Erving Goffman, a sociologist, tells of a personal experience in a provincial British university during the 1940's. Class status was of some importance then and a junior staff member often faced a dilemma when alone with a senior staff person in the teachers' lounge. The junior member sometimes felt that sitting far away from the senior was an act of unfriendliness but sitting within easy chatting distance would constitute a presumption; the result was that the junior member frequently took a position at a chair on the boundary between the two distances, leaving it to the senior member to determine how much interaction, if any, should occur.[5]

We are familiar with some of the methods of staking out territory, including the use of books, coats or magazines to define a spatial area; sometimes simply the fact that you have been in one place for a long time will make others assume that such a place belongs to you; a frequent ploy in public places is to ask a neighbor to help defend your territory--"Would you hold my seat while I go exchange my ticket?" Studies reveal that people construe ownership of space by position; in a library, for example, if a student assumes a position at a corner reading table, newcomers assume that he does not wish to be disturbed; however, if a person establishes himself in a central location, people are more likely to join him; this is subject, of course, to the posture adopted by the inhabitant of the space. If he appears to have his materials spread out as if he "owned" the place, people will sit elsewhere if possible. In most cases verbal defense of space will not

occur; glances may be exchanged, materials may be re-shuffled to suggest more definite boundaries, but ordinarily a person will get up and leave before complaining about a violation of his spatial rights.

It has been discovered that the arrangement of seating also affects the amount of interaction that occurs. In 1968 the Paris peace talks provided an important illustration; for eight months negotiations were held simply to determine the size and shape of the negotiation table. Position and distance were of the utmost importance to the parties being represented because such considerations were reflections of status. In everyday circumstances, however. people tend to follow certain patterns of behavior. If frequent conversation is desired, people will sit opposite each other or facing each other across the corner of a table; direct-opposite positioning offers full visibility of each party while end-corner positioning provides a closeness without the constant eye contact. Studies of behavior in meetings and seminars suggest that leaders gravitate toward end positions at rectangular tables and that individuals who make the most vocal contributions tend to sit in a central position on either side of the table.

Most present day classrooms are good examples of how a lack of awareness about spatial relations affects interaction; chairs face forward and frequently are bolted to the floor to prevent any variation in arrangement. The chairs themselves are uncomfortable, undoubtedly based on the conviction carried over from pioneer days that a little pain is a good stimulant and assures the teacher of a group of wide-awake scholars. Even though studies exist showing that learning occurs more rapidly and consistently in environments which provide flexible use of space, many schools still are being built on the same old patterns.

The teacher fortunate enough to have both moveable furniture and sufficient space needs to become aware of how seating arrangements affect communication. Students learn to distinguish the relationship between the types of materials presented and the arrangement of seats. In fact, students may become so conditioned to this relationship that when a teacher attempts to introduce a different procedures within the context of a familiar seating plan, he may encounter student resistance. Students in one study were asked to select from a series of seating arrangements, the one which they felt was the most flexible; their choice was the horseshoe arrangement.[6]

Position in a seating arrangement also appears to be connected with the amount of communication interaction that occurs. In the traditional lecture format--all desks facing forward with the teacher located at the front--highly motivated and vocal students tend to sit in the front or central positions; uninterested, poorly motivated students tend to select seats near the back of the room or in fringe areas of each row, primarily out of direct eye range of the teacher.

Architects and interior designers have become increasingly aware of the strong relationship between structural-esthetic conditions and human behaviors. Physical distance, for example, may have a great deal to do with friendship choices and interaction. Builders of low-cost urban housing developments have been surprised at the amount of hostility and the lack of interaction among residents. Sociologists, however, have determined that because of design features, many of these developments actually encourage hostility and the break-down

of communication among residents. Traffic flow, positioning of stairs, location of common facilities--these and many other factors need to be studied to determine how each contributes to the development of communication. Some recent housing designs for the aged have attempted to promote interaction by adopting a circular floor plan with all the doors on a given floor openings into a common entrance hall. Here people will meet daily on a face to face basis and because they share a common area, they will be encouraged to make contacts and open communication.

If one doubts that structural-esthetic conditions have significant effects on human behavior and communication, he should spend some time in a variety of public places. Airport terminals, railroad stations and even restaurants discourage interaction; the straight lines of chairs in transportation terminals discourage communication; conversation side by side with both parties facing forward is difficult. Even the chairs themselves are designed to keep people from becoming too comfortable. The extreme, of course, is the restaurant owner who had chairs specially designed to give the occupant a backache after he had been in the seat for a specified period of time. In this manner the owner assured himself of a constantly changing clientele and presumably a larger gross profit.

Territorial rights, use of space---these are important aspects of nonverbal behavior. But much of our awareness of these aspects remains

subconscious; we react and do the proper thing without even noticing. For instance, if a person must pass through the apparent territory of another, a certain behavior pattern usually emerges. Perhaps the territory is the corridor of a public building, perhaps it is someone's backyard or the neighborhood of a different ethnic group. Typically during passage through such places, the individual lowers his head slightly, the body curls in so chest and shoulders become less pronounced and the hands are held close to the body or in front of it; the basic impression one is sending out is that of unobtrusiveness.[7] Failure to follow such a behavior pattern can result in challenges from the inhabitants who read the nonverbal message being sent and assume their territorial rights are not being recognized.

Another aspect of space passage is the problem of whether or not to communicate with others one meets during the passage. We frequently experience this problem on city streets and in public corridors where people are constantly passing. The most common practice when strangers pass each other on neutral turf is called "civil inattention." At a distance of about twelve or fifteen feet (in uncrowded conditions) the individuals glance at each other, thus locating and acknowledging the presence of the other--this is civil behavior; then, as they continue to approach, each individual looks down and away; this indicates inattention and discourages further contact. If, for some reason, one of the parties wishes to break the pattern and address the other individual, he does so with extreme politeness--"Excuse me, may I ask the way to...." Such patterns seem to be unconscious but consistent modes of nonverbal behavior.[8]

Because people vary in their use of civil inattention, though,

misunderstandings occasionally occur. Women of Latin cultures, for example, hold the passing gaze longer than Jews or WASPs do. Blacks and whites often avoid the exchange of glances, but in some instances members of one ethnic group will establish a gaze and hold it until it amounts to a challenge. Americans typically interpret the long gaze as intimate and potentially embarrassing. An American tourist in Israel for the first time recounted such an experience. "My first day in Tel Aviv was disturbing," he said. "People not only stared right at me on the street, they actually looked me up and down. I kept wondering if I was uncombed or unzipped or if I just looked too American. Finally a friend explained that Israelis think nothing of staring at others on the street."[9]

An interesting aspect of nonverbal behavior appears in the initial contact between people. Kinesics experts have studied numerous occasions of greeting and by examining film excerpts of such situations they have determined that a rather set procedure is followed. Let us say that you are in a crowded room and you have just caught sight of someone who looks familiar; unconsciously you have embarked upon the following process. First comes the orientation, at least by the face and eyes, to the individual; this is followed, if you recognize the person, by an eyebrow flash of recognition: next comes the salutations followed by the presentation of the palm in some kind of waving gesture. The eyebrow flash is the most important aspect of the greeting procedure, since it determines whether further exchange will occur. The flash takes place in two stages; in the first phase, the greeter looks at the acquaintance, raises his lids slightly and sometimes puts his head back a little. In the second stage, an instant later, the eyebrows raise and the eyes open widely; this second stage is the signal that

recognition has occurred; without it, the acquaintance takes his chances upon approaching you. He may be rebuffed because the recognition is not there and thus for you he remains a stranger.[10]

The eyebrow flash is just one of the many types of nonverbal behaviors originating with the face and head. Usually the types of information communicated by the head area suggest the effect being experienced during interaction; other body cues that accompany the exchange primarily offer information about the level of arousal or the degree of intensity in the affective experience. The eyes, in particular, play an essential role in communication by serving to establish, prolong or discontinue communication. In some instances cultural differences mean that adjustments must be made in order to understand how the eyes are being used. Puerto Rican children in America often experience difficulty with their American teachers because the children tend to cast their eyes down in what they consider a proper response while being scolded; the American adult, however, sees this behavior as an effort to refuse acceptance of responsibility; the results of this misunderstanding are usually more scolding and a break-down in communication.

Eye contact and physical closeness have some connection, for cultures which have the greatest preference for physical closeness also show a consistently greater preference for eye contact. In some cases, however, an individual may wish to control others' access to him and the information he receives; for these reasons he may avoid looking toward the person who is seeking him. But a fine line divides the use of eye contact as a signal for continued communication and that of invasion. The stare is considered either an invasion of another's privacy or an effort to humiliate and subdue. Even Emily Post knew the social effects of direct eye contact. She said, "A 'cut" is very different

/from poor sight or a forgetful memory/. It is a direct stare of blank refusal, and is insulting not only to its victim but embarrassing to every witness. Happily it is practically unknown in polite society."[11]

One of the most frequent uses of eye contact occurs in situations where feedback concerning the reaction of others is desirable; if we are listening to someone, we tend to cast glances, ranging from three to ten seconds, at the other person to let him know we are still interested and receiving his message. If we are speaking, however, we tend to glance at the listener after we have finished our conversational "talk" or at a point where a natural pause occurs. Sometimes we use eye contact to signal our need for affiliation or support. Women seem to engage in more eye contact than do men, particularly if another woman forms part of the interaction.[12]

Certain movements of the face and hands seem to have evolved as part of the actions of speaking and listening; these are called gestures in kinesic research. We find, therefore, that a verbal statement may have its meaning modulated in a number of ways. Vocally, modulation comes by the use of overall volume, differentiated volume within the phrasing, variance of pitch and tone and also by means of accents. Facial movement such as smiles, sneers, the set of one's jaws, the elevation of the eyebrows or the opening or closing of the eyelids affect the message. In terms of posture, the set of the head, the position of the shoulders, the spinal position, movements of the trunk and the positioning of the feet can add subtle yet important distinctions to a message.

Because of the commonness of some gestures, we may assume that we know all there is to know about this aspect of nonverbal communication. Manual gestures, for example, fall into several groupings. Iconic

gestures are those which sketch what something is like or demonstrate how something operates. Such gestures might be those used to show dimension; or they could occur in conjunction with an abstract statement such as "I am going to level with you," the hand going out flat at the completion of the statement. A chopping or cutting gesture frequently indicates termination or impatience; sometimes this gesture includes slapping an object like a table or the sides of a chair; referencing gestures are those used to indicate the location of objects, places or people about whom the speaker is talking. In most cases these gestures are conventional enough so that the audience notices them but can still concentrate upon the verbal content of the message. Edward Sapir, however, warns us that "Gestures are hard to classify and it is difficult to make a conscious separation between that in gesture which is of merely individual origins and that which is referrable to the habits of a group as a whole. We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none and understood by all."[13]

An extension of gesture and body movement is found in metacommunication, nonverbal behavior that offers signals about on-going communication. These signals, cues or monitors are called metabehaviors and in most instances are used to regulate or extinguish any deviancy that is detected, thus assuring a normal communication process. For example, a disturbance caused by someone entering a room late may be monitored in several ways by those already present. A glance may be thrown toward the intruder; this may be followed by a direct, censoring stare; in some cases the glance may be followed by a physical turning away as of dismissal. In more direct, personal encounters, a listener

may show his disapproval of what is being said by a frown; in some cases the wiping of the index finger laterally across the nostrils suggests doubt or displeasure. Grooming or cleaning actions such as the apparent cleaning of the fingernails or the polishing of glasses suggests disapproval of a statement or action. A speaker will respond to both negative and positive monitors and, depending upon which predominates, unconsciously will begin to make adjustments. Several years ago the students of a psychology professor decided to employ behavior modification on him in an effort to make him lecture as if he were Napoleon Bonaparte. Whenever his right hand came near his body, students leaned forward, opened their eyes and started taking notes. Whenever he slumped or slurred or gestured with his right hand, they would glance away, pretend boredom and talk to each other. By the end of the semester the professor was unconsciously lecturing in short, crisp sentences, standing stern and rigid, with his right hand inserted into his shirt over his stomach.

Occasionally metabehaviors change. In America the wink used to be a popular signal, not only as a suggestion of flirtation, but also as a hint that a story being told was meant to kid or fool its listener. Today this metasignal is more likely to be formed by a trace of a smile, maybe with the eye-crinkling element of the wink. We appear to adjust to these changes quite easily and thus they do not constitute barriers to communication.

Yet some areas of communication do offer us difficulty and much of this difficulty can be traced to the nonverbal elements involved. For anyone who attempts to determine whether or not a person is lying, reliance on the characteristically more informative sources of nonverbal behavior such as the face and head proves to be less helpful than

attention paid to body cues supplied by arm, leg and foot movements. Charles Darwin observed that some actions ordinarily associated through habit with certain states of mind may be partially repressed by will, and in such cases the muscles which are least under the separate control of the will are the most likely to continue to act, causing movements which we recognize as expressive.[14] For example, the communicator who attempts to deceive may position himself at a slightly greater distance from his listener than when he is being truthful; he may gesticulate less frequently and show fewer positive head nods, but he will smile more than when he is truthful. His speech also may be affected; the rate may become slower, volume of the speech decreases and more frequent speech errors are heard.[15]

Sometimes an individual will find himself in a situation where speech attitudes are inconsistent. The total impact may be one of positive inconsistency; that is, a person may be verbally insulting while offering indicators of positive acceptance. A girl says, for example, "I don't think I like you very much" to her boyfriend while smiling at him and using loving vocalization signals. The reverse is also possible: an irritated facial expression accompanies positive vocal expression as in the statement, "Oh, that's really great, just great."

The child frequently finds himself in double-bind communication situations where two or more inconsistent attitude messages are given; as a consequence the person addressed is faced with incompatible responses. Thus we have the teacher who encourages a student on a

task while implicitly conveying indifference for what the student is being asked to do; or the case of the father talking to his pre-school daughter: "Now, you don't have to be scared of the roller coaster. I'll go with you so you can see how much fun it is." The father then grasps the little girl's hand and she feels a nervous, shaking, clammy hand in hers. Faced repeatedly with such double-bind messages, children often learn to respond with their own, such as "I can't come because my leg hurts."

My discussion has focused primarily on the most commonly accepted aspects of nonverbal behavior, but several other areas are worthy of passing notice. While it is obvious that sight and hearing are the most important sensors for social communication, the sense of smell may also have effects upon communication. Americans spend thousands of dollars to deodorize themselves and their environment and then turn right around and buy "natural scents" to increase their allure. To some nationalities, the sense of smell is most important. For the Arab to be able to smell a friend is reassuring. Good smells are pleasant and smelling is simply a way of being involved with another. In the Arab culture, when a prospective bride is inspected for her suitability , the intermediaries often will ask to smell her; contrary to what we might expect, they are not checking to determine if she has freshly bathed, but, more importantly to them, to determine

whether or not any lingering odor of anger or discontent can be detected.[16]

Another aspect of some importance to the relationship between nonverbal behavior and communication lies in how the human body is clothed. To understand this relationship we should be familiar with the numerous functions clothes fulfull; some of these include decoration, protection--both physical and psychological--sexual attraction, group identification and status. Obviously the degree of accuracy with which judgements about a person can be based upon his clothing varies. Nevertheless, because dress traditionally has been used as a measure of respect for social occasions, people still tend to make judgements and these can create misunderstandings. Young people today are aware of at least one aspect of the relationship between dress and communication and they have exploited it; the unisex look has caused many older people to complain that they no longer can tell the sexes apart. To the young, that is the essential point--they don't care whether or not the older generation can tell them apart.

The vastness of the nonverbal influence on communication is apparent, but educators are left with the question of how an awareness of nonverbal behavior can fit into the classroom. In reality the average classroom offers a vast supply of information about nonverbal communication that remains relatively untouched by scientific studies. The simple processes of acceptance and understanding of ideas and actions on the part of both students and teachers involve extensive

nonverbal elements. The teacher interested in improving his own communication skills will find his classroom a rich land for practice and exploration. Some possible areas of concentration include the following:

1. An examination and interpretation of different students' reactions to various questioning practices
2. The development of groups and social interaction in the classroom--what factors enhance the process? which factors deter the process?
3. An examination of the cultural clashes that occur as a result of different uses of nonverbal behavior
4. A study of the effects of dress and hair styles on teacher-student interaction
5. An analysis of seating arrangements, physical conditions and architectural design within the classroom and their apparent effects on communication

With language we know that in order to communicate at all, we must follow certain grammatical patterns, for the meanings of words depend at least partly on the other words with which they are grouped. It appears quite possible that similar considerations may be applied to nonverbal behavior in the communication process. Nonverbal communication may have some kind of syntax which governs both its own sequences and its links with language. Although such a system has yet to be completely explained, its potential for enabling us to understand the human communication process can not be denied; consequently we should begin to make what we already know of this process a more integral part of our teaching of language and behavior.

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